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PAIGE ANNOUNCES NEW INITIATIVES TO CELEBRATE TEACHERS

Paige sends Congress progress report about states' teacher quality initiatives

U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige today announced a national commitment to celebrate teachers and the teaching profession with a series of initiatives designed to assist states and educators in meeting the highly qualified teacher requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The centerpiece of the outreach effort is the new Teacher Assistance Corps, a team of education experts, researchers and practitioners who will provide voluntary support to states as they carry out the highly qualified teacher provisions of the law.

The announcement came as Paige sent to Congress his second annual report on states' teacher quality initiatives, "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge."

"President Bush and I believe teachers are the backbone of our nation's schools," Secretary Paige said. "Today, I am pleased to announce some exciting outreach efforts to provide guidance and assistance to states, educators and administrators as they work to meet No Child Left Behind's bold goal of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by 2005-2006.

"One year ago, we issued our first report to Congress on the quality of teacher preparation nationwide. This year's report shows that states are making progress in strengthening teacher quality, but we must do more to ensure that every child has the best possible instruction."

The Teaching Assistance Corps will travel to states and perform onsite reviews tailored to the explicit needs and concerns of state officials. The teams will offer guidance and feedback on state efforts, address specific state challenges and provide useful information from other states

about promising practices in the field. Corps members also will clarify issues confused by misunderstanding and misinformation. State participation is voluntary.

Paige also announced that the Education Department is developing a tool kit that will provide educators with accurate, easy-to-understand information about No Child Left Behind, including student achievement research that supports the rationale for the teacher quality provisions. The tool kit also will include information about loan forgiveness, tax credits and liability protection for teachers, as well as links to helpful Web sites and guidance on understanding the federal, state and local roles in No Child Left Behind.

Under No Child Left Behind, highly qualified teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree, have full state certification or licensure and have demonstrated competence in their subject areas. However, states also have the flexibility to develop alternative certification methods to enable veteran teachers to show they have the content knowledge to be successful in the classroom. This process may include a teacher's experience, success as measured by student test scores, credit from classes or high-quality professional development experiences and other evaluations. Core subjects are defined as English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history and geography.

President Bush's 2004 budget proposal includes a commitment of more than \$4 billion in federal funding to help states prepare, recruit and retain teachers in order to meet the highly qualified teacher requirements.

This fall, the department expects to issue updated guidance on specific issues related to teacher quality, including options for middle school teachers, rural school challenges and additional clarifications for veteran teachers. The updated guidance will build on the

department's Title I regulations, which were published December 2, 2002; and the Title II non-regulatory guidance, published December 19, 2002.

The secretary's report to Congress provides a progress update on state efforts to raise academic standards for teachers and lower barriers that keep many talented individuals out of the teaching profession. States are showing gains in some areas. For example, as of October 2002, 35 states had developed and linked teacher certification requirements to student content standards -- up from 24 the previous year. All but nine states have approved an alternative route to certification.

The report also highlights several promising innovations under way to meet the highly qualified teachers goal. These include bold reforms in two major areas -- traditional teacher preparation programs and alternative routes to teaching.

For example, West Virginia University and 29 elementary and secondary schools have formed a school-university partnership through the Benedum Collaborative, which emphasizes early classroom experience for teaching candidates, beginning in the sophomore year. Teaching candidates are supervised, mentored and evaluated by accomplished K-12 classroom teachers rather than university faculty. The candidates also complete an action research project that documents their classroom performance.

The report also highlights New York City's alternative route to teaching program, pioneered in 2000 to address the city's teacher shortage problem. The city's Teaching Fellows Program recruits candidates with a bachelor's or master's degree in the subject they will teach. Teaching fellows undertake intensive training the summer before entering the classroom, field-based work with experienced New York City teachers and a series of meetings with advisers on classroom techniques and teaching skills; at the same time they begin pursuing a master's in

education during the evenings and weekends at one of 14 college partners. Last year, the Teaching Fellows Program produced 25 percent of the city's new hires.

“Teachers are the heroes of the classroom, who are on the front line day after day, week after week, dedicated to meeting the needs of each child in their classroom,” Secretary Paige added. “This is by no means a simple task -- youngsters have a wide range of learning styles that, in turn, require teachers to employ a wide array of teaching techniques, to use a variety of materials and to be constantly creative. President Bush and I stand behind our classroom teachers with the greatest respect and support as they carry out the daunting and imperative goal of ensuring that each child experiences the joy of learning and that not a single one is left behind.”

The report to Congress, including state reports and accompanying information, is available at www.title2.org.

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